

Cincinnati Commodore Computer Club

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c/o 31 Potowatomie Trail Milford, OH 45150

December, 2006 President's Page

Howdy Fellow Commodore Users!

Last month we discussed our options of when we would like to have an encore presentation of C=4 Expo for 2007. We pretty much narrowed it down to the first weekend in May. It seems Drawbridge Inn is going to be hopping that weekend with a dog show in the room we had last year, and the room we hoped to get (based on the discussion of November's meeting) was already booked.

The room we will be occupying is approximately 2352 sq ft compared to the 3648 sq ft we had last year, almost 2/3 the size, roughly. As of my writing, the contract has not yet been signed, but a verbal agreement to hold that size room has been reserved for us. For those folks who read this via our exchange newsletters, or via the web, please do not advertise anything concrete yet, as plans are still in the works. I would recommend, that if you do plan to show up for the 2007 C=4 Expo, you should make your sleeping room reservations early once the official announcements start rolling out, as the hotel is likely to be booked up that weekend with all the activity it will be hosting.



This month's meeting will bring us all up to speed with the last minute facts.

The last meeting of 2006, will be held on December 17th, in the Cincinnati Public Library in Room 3B.

I would like to take a moment to wish everyone, regardless of your religious affiliation, a joyous season. Take a moment yourself to reflect over the past year and rejoice in your accomplishments and joys. May you all have a Happy New Year, one with good fortune, and great peace. As a great TV star once said, and I think it is a great line: Live Long and Prosper!

Keep on Commodoring!

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The QLINK/AOL Saga, by Randell Jesup

Submitted by Roger Hoyer, Reprinted from Loadstar Issue #246
Originally found on DejaNews, from comp.sys.cbm

Brian Heyboer writes:

>Brian Williams Wrote:

>>I've been reading about this for some tiem, and.. can anyone tell me
>>why America Online won't sell the software or the rights to run QLink?
>>What the hell are they scared of?

>

>I can't tell you for sure, but I suspect they are afraid it will give
>away some of their security systems that are also used in the AOL
>software. Remember, there was a lot more on the Q-Link end than just
>the interface for the users. There was also their entire billing and
>password security system. There was also a "back door" of sorts where
>QLink menus and what-not could be updated via AOL.

AOL is in fact largely based on rewritten QLink (nee PlayNet) code. Many
of the algorithms are unchanged.

>Another possibility is that they cannot rather than will not. QLink
>licensed the software from PlayNet and acquired the rights to it only
>after winning a lawsuit against the receiver of the bankrupt PlayNet.
>They never did get all the source code and documentation the lawsuit
>gave them the rights to. So, they may not be able to either because
>the terms of the judgement don't allow it or they simply don't have it
>all.

In fact, they may not have the right to resell the technology; it depends
on what rights they got. (I suspect they eventually got all the rights,
though.)

They did, however, have all the source code and documentation for the
PlayNet system, at least as it was when they licensed it (we made a
number of mods later to PlayNet, some of which were activated and some of
which never were). I spent a number of days down there training various
programmers on the design.

One thing added after QLink (now AOL) licensed PlayNet was a quite
complete auditorium/panel/etc setup with queuing, moderators, etc, run
entirely via online messages (no client software change required). This
was complete and tested and finished the week before PlayNet declared
bankruptcy, so no one ever actually used it. There were other things
too, but I remember that because I was working on it as PlayNet went
under. Of course, they made their own mods (initially mostly cosmetic,
but they added lots of stuff later).

As must be obvious, I was one of the main (and last) programmers at
PlayNet. It's really amusing to look at AOL today and say "I know why
users are limited to 10-character names.", and see many other elements of
the original PlayNet design unchanged (even though the reason for them is
LONG gone).

For example, the 10-character name limit was largely based on how many
screen names we could display in the room header in chat within 4(?)
40-character lines on a C64 screen. Ditto the screen-name defaults (I
remember us sitting around BS'ing about how we'd handle that, and
conflicts -- so now you have Joe\$12345.) Online messages and how they
popped up were another PlayNet idea (remember, the next-most
sophisticated system at the time was Comuserve's ASCII "CB". Much has
changed in AOL, of course, but it's kind of heartening to see just how
well a design from 1984-85 for 64K 6502 machines has held up over the
years, at least in the broad strokes.

The system (PlayNet and QLink) was actually quite sophisticated. It was
run by programs written in a multi-tasking state-machine language. (Yes,
your C64 was multi-tasking when doing this - N state-machine tasks, plus
the "main" (basic/etc) task, which ran the game or whatever it needed.
Things like online messages caused a new task to be started.)

The communications protocol was designed (by me) to error-correct the
X.25 pad<->modem link, obey a limit on packet size (128?), and minimize
the number of packets (since we were charged by the hour and the packet
[CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE]

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The QLINK/AOL Saga, by Randell Jesup, Continued

back then). It used CRC error-checking (yes, in a C64), asymmetric sliding-windows, piggybacked-acks, selective retransmit, etc.

It may be that this protocol continued (continues?) to be used in modified form in AOL, from what an AOL engineer told me shortly after QuantumLink launched AOL. I also wrote the fast-loader (which hid itself under the screen ram when not in use, and used huffman compression of all files to help speed loads) and other bits like the server side of the BBS (news-sort-of) section (my original rejected design was much more like News; amusing since I hadn't seen News at that point).

The server side ran (and runs) under Stratus VOS on Stratus fault-tolerant hardware (originally at PlayNet a Stratus 200, with 8 12Mhz 68010's). The server-side software was (and may still be) written in PL/I subset G, as was most of Stratus software of the era, including the OS (C was introduced around the time PlayNet went under).

The design of the PlayNet server software was specifically set up to make maximal use of multiple servers connected by medium-speed links. For example, each chat room was a separate process (if I remember correctly, or maybe each process handled N rooms), and all the IPC was set up to use Virtual Circuits (sort-of equivalent to sockets), so they didn't care whether the other end was on the same system or not.

AOL still runs on Stratus hardware, and pushes it (and VC's etc) to the limit I'm told. For a while they kept an old Stratus in the corner of the machine room for C64 owners, as I'm sure you know.

It's also amusing to now see the explosion of networked games; many ideas just now reaching the public are very similar to the stuff we built prototypes of or sat around discussing back then.

If people really want, I suppose I could write up my view on the soap opera of how PlayNet was, what happened, how AOL nee QLink nee CVC got the software, etc.

--

Randell Jesup, Scala US R&D,
Ex-Commodore-Amiga Engineer class of '94

World Of Commodore 2006 Expo Report and Pictures



Jim Butterfield lectures on BASIC, not an empty chair in the room.



They adore their 64s

#c64friends regular Rhapsody appears in this news article from the Toronto paper.

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World Of Commodore 2006 Expo Report and Pictures, Continued

World of Commodore is an annual event held by the Toronto PET User's Group (TPUG), in Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

Having decided that my car was not quite up to snuff, I opted to carpool with two of our members from Indy, Mark Gladson and Dave Fisher. This was a fortunate choice, as it turned out, as we are all the same age, and come from the same sort of scenes. So the talk on the 12-hour(!) car ride was lively, and covered a wide range of topics that were near and dear to us, and lots of bragging about our old local BBS scenes and how much fun the old days were.

We had no trouble at all getting into Canada, they simply asked what we were there for, and how long we'd be staying, and waved us through. I had had visions of jackbooted border

guards with AK-47's, but fortunately I was mistaken about the level of Canadian border security. The ONLY thing about Canada that I didn't find to my liking was the lack of beer. They hide it.



The expo room was in a church in Etobicoke, and was quite large. There was also a second room for holding demos. We stopped in on the night before the expo to be sociable and say hello to everyone, and got to hang out with the Palumbo family and Leif Bloomquist, and talk about all things Commodore for a bit.

The hotel that TPUG recommends is low-priced, but kind of icky, with a burning-hair smell. The wireless internet was non-functional. However, after a 12-hour drive, I'd probably sleep well on a dungheap, so it served our purpose nicely. (Next time I'm staying down the street.)

The expo went as expos usually do, the demos were interesting, especially Jim Butterfield's lecture on "How Not to Program". I botched part of my demo when I introduced a bug to my loader prg working on it in the car on the way up, but the hardware part of the demo went well, and everyone got a firsthand look at Adrian Gonzalez's Super Snapshot clone prototype.

There were a number of vendors at the Expo, the largest being TPUG. I picked up a bunch of Amiga books and a dead A2000 board (free!). Mark and Dave also loaded up on stuff, taking home a complete A2000 and CD32 system. There were tons of magazines, old systems, etc. for sale.

Coming back through the border, we were worried that we would have trouble, as we'd heard all sorts of weird things about coming into the US from Canada. However, when the border guard asked us what we were in Canada for, we told him "An expo for vintage computers, Commodore 64s", and he replied "Yeah, I've got one of those at home.", and waved us through. It's nice to discover that the appeal of Commodore computers is not just limited to people who are into computers as a hobby, but also just your average people you'd meet on the street.

We passed through Charlotte, Michigan on the way back, and it occurred to us that we might pay Maurice Randall a visit. However, when we arrived, no-one was there, so we left with nothing more than a snapshot of the building, instead of the truckload of CMD hardware we'd hoped for.

All in all this was a great expo. I highly recommend that anyone who wants to get into the expo scene put World of Commodore on their list of destinations. However, get a passport and take it with you, a recent change in US law will require that you have it to return to the US.

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Cincinnati Commodore Computer Club BBS Report, by Chuck Kern



November was a busy month on the BBS. In our first month online, we crossed the 20 user mark and got the BBS stable.

The BBS has a total of 23 users to date. Of these 23, 7 are Cincinnati Commodore Computer Club Members. Since there are more than 7 people in CCCC, it stands to reason that we need to be more proactive about getting our members online.

The new user questionnaire on the BBS asks new users where they heard about the BBS. Most of the users respond by saying that they located the BBS via a search on Google.com.

On <http://www.dmine.com>, we are at the top of the list of new BBS.

Return calls are not seeming to pick up as quickly as one would expect, certainly not at the pace that I am accustomed to as a SysOp from the old BBS golden years. Certainly the amount of traffic that telnet BBS get these days is not nearly as much as a dialup system would have gotten in 1987. However, like anything else, we can expect that the system will grow over time, and do whatever we can to add new features, online games, and conversation areas for the users.

We will be having an ANSI screen contest on the BBS over the next few months, the club president will select the winning screen. The contest will end on 1/31/2007. We should discuss some sort of prize to offer at the next meeting. This should also work for getting some nice C/G screens, as the BBS also supports classic Commodore Color/Graphics. I will post the rules for these contests on the BBS this week.

At the last club meeting, it was discussed about whether or not a local dialup node is needed for the club users that don't use the internet, but would call the BBS if they could with dialup. The cost for a single line to accept incoming calls would be in the \$20/month range.

Another option is to provide a PC from our parts bin with Netzero or some other dialup internet service on it. Between Six and I, we certainly have enough spare parts to build internet terminals for any of our users who might need them. For users who can't tolerate Netzero, Cincinnati Bell offers dialup to fuse for roughly \$10/month.

Some BBS Statistics:

*8 nodes, telnettable

*Peak usage is 2 nodes.

*14 gfiles online, including CCCC sale files

*8 message bases with 14 posts, with 21 replies

*0 voting topics

*0 news files

-Chuck Kern, BBS Sysop
Cincinnati Commodore Club BBS





Cincinnati Public Library Main Branch
Room 3B

Next Meeting
Sunday, December 17th
From 2PM to
4PM at

Cincinnati Commodore Computer Club
c/o Roger Hoyer
31 Potomac Trail
Miford, OH 45150



Cincinnati Commodore Computer Club

Current Officers

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